IN THE CLAIMS

This listing of the claims replaces all prior versions of the claims in the application.

1-46 (canceled)

47. (canceled)

48. (currently amended): A polynucleotide comprising a coding sequence for a multiple epitope fusion antigen comprising the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:5 ~~depicted in Figures 7A-7F~~, or an amino acid sequence with at least 90% sequence identity thereto, wherein said multiple epitope fusion antigen ~~which~~ reacts specifically with anti-HCV antibodies present in a biological sample from an HCV-infected individual, wherein said antibodies bind to an epitope of SEQ ID NO:5.

49. (currently amended): A polynucleotide comprising a coding sequence for a multiple epitope fusion antigen consisting of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:5 ~~depicted in Figures 5A-5F~~.

50. (canceled)

51. (original): A recombinant vector comprising:

(a) a polynucleotide according to claim 48;

(b) and control elements operably linked to said polynucleotide whereby the coding sequence can be transcribed and translated in a host cell.

52. (original): A recombinant vector comprising:

(a) a polynucleotide according to claim 49;

(b) and control elements operably linked to said polynucleotide whereby the coding sequence can be transcribed and translated in a host cell.

53. (canceled)

54. (currently amended): An isolated host cell transformed with the recombinant vector of claim 51.

55. (currently amended): An isolated host cell transformed with the recombinant vector of claim 52.

56. (canceled)

57. (original): A method of producing a recombinant multiple epitope fusion antigen comprising:

(a) providing a population of host cells according to claim 54; and

(b) culturing said population of cells under conditions whereby the multiple epitope fusion antigen encoded by the coding sequence present in said recombinant vector is expressed.

58. (original): A method of producing a recombinant multiple epitope fusion antigen comprising:

(a) providing a population of host cells according to claim 55; and

(b) culturing said population of cells under conditions whereby the multiple epitope fusion antigen encoded by the coding sequence present in said recombinant vector is expressed.

59. (new): The polynucleotide of claim 48 comprising the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO:4 or a nucleotide sequence having at least 90% sequence identity to SEQ ID NO:4.

60. (new): The polynucleotide of claim 49 comprising the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO:4.